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The Secret of Success

In a letter published in the Daily *Qaumi Awaz* (April 21, 1991), Mr. Mushtaq Ahmad, an advocate of the Supreme Court of India, comments on 'minority' attitudes: "In the days when I was a student at the Aligarh Muslim University, Mr. Iftikhar Ahmad Khan, Head of the Department of History, told me of an incident which had taken place in his student days at Cambridge University. It was at the time when the Jews, persecuted all over Europe, had been forced to flee from Germany. Iftikhar Ahmad noticed a group of students on the university campus who stood out from the others. They would always rush through their meals then immediately go back to their studies or other related matters. One day Mr. Ahmad asked them why they were working at such a frenzied pace. One of the students replied, "You see, we are Jews. Our people are being exterminated in Germany. Here, we are in a minority, so that if our rivals are fair, we have to be good, and if they are good, we have to be excellent."

The secret of the Jews' success lies in their having made excellence their way of life and in working harder than their competitors. To have the peace and concentration which real, hard work requires, one has to stay away from all strife, whether serious or trifling, from all protest campaigns and slogan raising, and refrain from all attempts to blame others for one's own weaknesses. The Jews realised that, being in a minority, they had to shoulder a great social and historical responsibility. And that meant working twice as hard as the majority. (p. 3)

This is a world of competition. The secret of success lies solely in hard work and wisdom, whether one is a Jew or not, and no matter whether the community to which one belongs has any special features which make it stand out from other communities. Everyone has to go through the mill. There is no exception to this rule.

The Jews are so particular about this that they make no concessions to their young people, even in their own institutions, so that their incentive to work hard is never dampened.

I once asked an acquaintance of mine who was educated at an American university, and who is now working in an American academic institution, whether he had met any Jews there. He said he had. There were some Jews working in the same institution, and even its director was a Jew, I asked him the secret of the Jews' success in America, where they form a tiny minority. He said it was due to their notions of excellence. They made excellence their target, and once they had earned distinction in their work and qualified themselves for their careers in a superlative manner, no one could stand in the way of their success.

He said, moreover, that the academic institutions set up by the Jews in the U.S.A. observed what seems to us to be a very strange principle. That is, they awarded scholarships to non-Jewish applicants with even as few as 40 per cent marks, while making the criterion for Jewish applicants much more strict. To be eligible for a scholarship, Jews had to have 75 per cent marks.

If they failed to come up to this high standard, their applications were simply not considered.

Why do Jews follow this principle in their institutions? This appears to be a very unjustified procedure but, in actual fact, it is of the greatest benefit to their own young people, because it encourages them to work really hard, it inspires them to forge ahead, leaving all others behind.

Here, in this competitive world of today, those who want concessions will always find themselves in the back seat. It is only those who make every effort to earn excellent qualifications who will ever come to the fore.

Missing Zeal

The Holy Prophet commenced his mission in Mecca with the determination to convey the word of God to mankind at all costs. But there were many in Mecca who became antagonistic to him and his cause, and in the first twelve years of his Prophethood there, it appeared that the history of Islam would end at its starting-point in Mecca. Then, quite unlooked for opportunities were created for the Prophet and his followers to emigrate to Medina and to carry on their mission there.

This new direction which his missionary activities took was the direct result of the efforts made by the Muslims to preach the word of God in Medina. In this, the Prophet, aided by his companions, was zealous in following the injunction: "Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord" and in heeding the admonition: "...if you do not, you will surely fail to convey his message." It was their earnest belief in the last part of this injunction: "God will protect you from all men," which gave them the courage to carry on (5:67). This message to the Prophet, recorded in the Qur'an, was spread to the whole Muslim community, that is, that Muslims can only earn God's protection on earth if they communicate the word of God.

It is related in biographies of the Prophet, that the Muslims who went from Mecca to Medina were so unflagging in their efforts to propagate Islam, that "there was not a house belonging to the Ansar (the inhabitants of Medina) in which there were no Muslim men and women.

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Devotion to God: food for the soul

The Prophet Muhammad is recorded as having said: "When I pass the night in vigil, I have a Sustainer and a Nourisher to provide me with food and drink."

Religious Harmony

What the world needs today – perhaps more than anything else – is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, I shall attempt to present here, in brief, the Islamic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a verse of the Qur'an which reads:

He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost (3:85).

In the opinion of certain interpreters, this verse implies that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct.

Let us take another verse of the Qur'an which serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right–shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret (2:62).

This verse rules out the concept of community superiority for any given group: even Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No man or woman can earn his or her salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in the manyness of reality; on the contrary, it stresses reality's oneness. That is, according to Islam, reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Qur'an states:

Such is God, your real cherisher and substance. Apart from Truth what (remains) but error?
How then are you turned away from Him? (10:32)

This verse makes it clear that monotheism (i.e. one Lord being the Creator, Sustainer and object of worship) is the only truth. All other paths lead one away from, rather than towards the truth. The fact that certain religious thinkers believe in the manyness of reality is of no concern to Islam. With oneness as its ideal, it cannot accept manyness even as a hypothesis.

Both of the above points – (a) the oneness of Absolute Reality, and (b) Salvation as the prerogative of the true believer in this oneness – form a major part of Islamic ideal. Just being born into a certain group or community, or associating oneself with others of similar persuasions, does not entitle one to salvation, be one a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

Now let us deal with the fact that; in practice, different kinds of religious groups do exist. Then, given the various kinds of differences separating them, let us consider, how to bring about harmony between them.

One solution commonly advocated is to spread the conviction that all religions are essentially one: that they are simply diverse paths leading to a common destination. Islam, however, does not accept this view and, in any case, experience has shown that repeated attempts to bring about harmony on this basis have been a failure. The Emperor Akbar attempted to achieve harmony by state enforcement of his newly formed religion, 'Din-e-Illahi;' Dr. Bhagwan Das spent the best part of his life producing a one-thousand page book titled *Essential Unity of All Religions*; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) attempted to spread this ideal at the national level by a countrywide movement whose slogan was '*Ram Rahim ek hai*', meaning Ram and Rahim were one and the same. But events have shown us that all failed in their attempts to achieve the goal of religious harmony.

Islam's approach to the entire problem is much more realistic in that it accepts ideological differences. Once having accepted these differences, it then advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the English saying. 'Let's agree to disagree.'

In this connection, one of the commands of the Qur'an is that, in principle, 'there shall be no compulsion in religion' (2:256). At another place it declares that 'you have your religion and I have mine' (109:6). It was as a result of this commandment that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, he issued a declaration re-affirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the religion of Jews for the Jews.' In order to perpetuate the atmosphere of mutual harmony, the Qur'an commands the Muslims in their dealings with unbelievers not to 'revile (the idols) which they invoke besides Allah, lest in their ignorance they should spitefully revile Allah.'

This principle formulated by Islam is best described not as religious harmony, but as harmony among religious people. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but on agreeing to disagree.

One extremely revolutionary example of this principle is to be found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It concerns the conference of three religions which was held in the Prophet's own mosque in Medina. This conference is described by Muhammad Husain Haykal in his book, *The Life of Muhammad*:

The three scriptural religions thus confronted one another in Madinah. The delegation entered with the Prophet into public debate and these were soon joined by the Jews, thus resulting in a tripartite dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This was a truly great congress which the city of Yathrib had witnessed. In it, the three religions which today dominate the world and determine its destiny had met, and they did so for the greatest idea and the noblest purpose.

Although Islam believes, in the oneness of reality it lays equal stress on the practice of tolerance in everyday dealings, even if it means going to the extent of permitting non-Muslims to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

Tolerance has been the rule throughout the history of Islam. It has, in fact, been one of the main underlying causes of its successful dissemination. Here I quote from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Islam achieved astonishing success in its first phase. Within a century after the Prophet's death in 632 AD (the early generations of Muslims) it had brought a large part of the globe – from Spain across central Asia to India under a new Arab Muslim empire.

And this is the part which I wish particularly to stress:

Despite these astonishing achievements other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy (9/912).

Now the complicating factor is that when any religion having reached this stage of antiquity has secured a sacred place in the hearts of its believers, it becomes impossible to bring about any changes in it. Efforts to bring about a change can produce a new religion, but they can never succeed in changing the old religion. There are many examples of such failures in the past.

A very important point from the practical point of view is that although the necessity to bring about harmony among the different religions is not a newly-felt imperative, endeavours towards that end are still only in the formative stages. If progress towards that goal has been slow of attainment, it is because of the established positions which ancient religions have secured in the hearts of their followers, simply by virtue of their antiquity. Trying to bring about changes in these religions per se has never brought about harmony, because instead of old religions being brought closer together by this process, they have developed rather into new religions, a process which has either left the problem of disharmony unsolved or has further aggravated it. There are many examples of such abortive efforts in the past.

In view of this historical reality, it is clear that the suggestions made by Islam as to how to produce harmony among the different religions is the only viable solution. Any alternative suggestion, however attractive it might appear, would be either impracticable or counter-productive.

Once, when discussing this point with me, a religious scholar said, 'We have been attempting to bring about interreligious harmony for the last one hundred years, but the results have been quite dismal. It would seem that there are insurmountable obstacles in the way.'

I replied that the goal we want to attain is certainly a proper one; it is simply that the strategy we employ is impracticable. Religious harmony is without doubt a desirable objective. But it cannot be achieved by attempting to alter people's beliefs – a policy advocated by more than one scholar in this field. The only way to tackle the problem is to encourage people to show respect for others' beliefs and to be humanitarian at all times in their dealings with adherents of other religions. It is vital to realize that it is quite possible to inculcate this attitude without in any way tampering with long-cherished credos. It should never be conceded that the goal of religious harmony is unattainable simply because people's beliefs differ from each other. It is certainly a possibility provided that it is seen as a matter of practical strategy and not as a pretext for making ideological changes.

'Practical strategy' is something which people regularly resort to in matters of their daily existence. As such, it is a known and acceptable method of solving the problem. Since no new ground has to be broken, either for the religious scholar or for the common man, it should be a very simple matter for people to extend their everyday activity, within their own sphere of existence, to include an honest and sincere effort towards global religious harmony. It is simply a question of having the will and the foresight to do so.

Man and Opportunity

Pubilius Syrus, a Roman writer of the first century B.C. who wrote in Latin is recorded as having said: "A good opportunity is seldom presented and is easily lost." – An observation which may well be taken out of the Roman context and universally applied. For it is a matter of common circumstance that chances to make progress in this world do not conveniently present themselves at every juncture. They are few and far between. But most people, unconvinced of how imperative it is to realize their special importance, fail to grasp them in time. Thus golden opportunities are lost forever, and all that remains is regret at having so foolishly missed them.

The same is true of the Hereafter, but on a scale barely appreciable by human beings. There are the wholly different dimensions of eternal bliss or eternal damnation to be taken into consideration. Everyone, of course, has been given opportunities in the present world to act in the interests of his own salvation in the life after death. But these are opportunities which very seldom present themselves. And then death – the great cut – off point – comes and puts and end to opportunities for all time.

After death, when man's eyes are opened he receives a severe shock. Now he finds himself doomed to eternal regret at having squandered unparalleled opportunities, thanks to his own ignorance, foolishness and lack of any sense of timeliness.

Everyone in this world should behave as a morally responsible servant of God and everyone is given equal opportunities to do so. Yet, in the Hereafter, there will be some who will flounder on the question of missed opportunities, while there will be others who will pass the divine test because of opportunities seized and turned to good advantage. It will be quite obvious on that Day which of God's servants availed of opportunities to serve Him, and which of them did not.

This ultimate reckoning should make us examine our lives with greater earnestness. As we are sufficiently aware of the fact – considering that none of us are immortal – that we cannot go through life allowing one opportunity after another to slip through our fingers? We cannot surely expect to be offered unlimited chances for our own salvation. And once death intervenes, looking for alternative possibilities beyond the grave becomes meaningless. There we are ineluctably faced with an eternity of success or an eternity of failure.

The Making of the Indian Nation

Almost half a century has passed since India gained its independence, but it has yet to join the ranks of the developed countries. That is a dream still to be realized. And this is in spite of India being a large country with all kinds of potential.

One reason for this tragic failure is the Indian people's lack of national character. The majority of the deficiencies we find in the country today can be traced to this basic shortcoming. Bereft of this sterling quality, we have fallen short in taking the country towards progress and prosperity.

What is national character? It is, to put it simply, the capacity and the will to hold the interests of the nation supreme in every sphere. Whenever there is a clash between individual and national interests, it means individual concerns being subordinated to the greater good of the nation. Whenever a nation has made any progress, it has been due to this spirit of nationalism. Without such a spirit, no nation can advance itself either internally or externally.

Now the question arises as to why, during this period of just under 50 years, many countries have succeeded in fostering a strong, national spirit in their people, and now stand alongside developed countries like Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Japan, etc., while India still lags far behind. There is one basic reason for this: attempting to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. Producing national spirit or character in India is certainly possible. It is just that we have set off on the wrong track, and once on it, it is difficult to retrace our steps and get on to the right track.

After independence, an "Indian nation" had come into existence in the political and geographical sense. But, at the psychological level, the level of feelings and emotions, our position was still that of a nation in the making. For the desired national reconstruction to take place, our leaders proposed a recipe based on the concept of a common heritage with three main parts: religious unity, historical unity and cultural unity.

Religious unity implied that all religions were essentially one. It was believed that if this concept could take root in people's minds, it would produce a sense of unity all over the country. Historically, of course, this assumption was wrong; there is a long, sorry record of co-religionists fighting fiercely among themselves. For instance, in the war of Mahabharat, the warriors on both sides were of the Hindu religion. In the first and second world wars, the combatants on both sides were of the Christian faith. Babar had armed confrontations with his own co-religionists, finally inflicting decisive defeats on them. And so on.

The attempt to bring about religious unity in India has had active support right from the time of Akbar, who bolstered it politically, to present times, when intellectuals such as Dr. Bhagwan Das (a

contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru) attempted to solve the problem with their encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. But this goal could never be achieved for the simple reason that the assumption that all religions are one and the same is incorrect; and no durable structure can be erected on false premises. It is an undeniable fact that there are differences between the various religions. Given these differences, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the adherents of one religion to reach the point of agreeing that the tenets and practices of another religion have an equal value. However, if the adherents of different religions see each other, first and foremost, as human beings, as members of the same human race, they can certainly accord each other equal respect. Through mutual respect, many social benefits can accrue which would be rendered impossible in the wake of futile attempts at mutual recognition of religious beliefs.

Let us now look at how history comes into the picture. It is assumed that even where there are people of different persuasions, a common sense of history will produce a common sense of nationhood. And where this is seen to be lacking, it is advocated that such a sense be inculcated. But this would again be an attempt to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. All countries, be they as small as Singapore, or as large as the U.S.A., are inhabited by varied races and ethnic groups. In this respect there are several different strands to their historical heritage. But in none of these countries has there been any attempt to bulldoze people into sharing a common sense of history. Instead, there has been an acknowledgment of each citizen's individuality. That is why, albeit imbued with different historical feelings, the various groups lead harmonious lives and are engaged in the common cause of nation building.

The third point concerns the acceptance of a common culture. This is wholly impracticable. Culture inevitably evolves a long historical process. It can never be imposed upon a group through any external agency.

After the second world war, a movement was launched in the USA to produce a common culture throughout the country by a process of Americanization. A similar movement was launched in Canada, but in both countries, these initiatives were a failure. Ultimately both had to abandon the idea of uniculture and come to terms with multi-culture. In India, as elsewhere, this is the only possible solution.

The truth is that the only practicable basis of nationhood is patriotism. That is, the feeling on the part of the individual or group that their future is linked with one country and one country alone; that individual success is inextricably linked with the progress of the country; that the interests of the country must be held supreme, and that if sacrifices are required for the safety or advancement of the country, they must be willingly made. Without such feelings of patriotism as are here defined, no country can be successfully run.

If the tasks of constructing the nation is to be successfully accomplished, we must rid ourselves of our obsession with such impracticable concepts as unity of religion, history and culture, and should forge ahead on the same lines as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Britain, France and America.

Our prime target should be the generation of patriotism in our country. And it should be a patriotism which is based not on the past, but on the present and the future. The only way to do this is to instill in each and every individual a deep-rooted love of his country. Instead of wasting time on the impossible, we should concentrate on building the kind of national character to be found in developed countries. If we set ourselves sedulously to such tasks as these, we should, within the span of one generation, be able to create for ourselves the ideal nation.

The Change of Strategy

The only way to arrive at a practicable solution to the problem of communal riot is to have a change of tactics, that is, there should be a change of the arena in which efforts are being made, that is migration of the field of effort. To date, all our writers and speakers have been attempting to solve the problem of riots by targeting others, that is, protesting against communal parties; demanding that the government and the administration check the riots. But these efforts, though on a large scale, have not resulted in even a one per cent improvement in riot control.

Now it is time for Muslims to become self-reliant on this issue, that is, to think and plan independently to find a solution by their own efforts.

A self-based solution does not in any way mean planning a defence-strategy, or giving a counter challenge. So-called defence would only escalate the matter. It would never solve it. By a self-based solution, I mean the adoption of a policy of patience and avoidance. This is the only sure solution, and it lies entirely in Muslim hands. In this, no one can obstruct or nullify our efforts.

According to a tradition recorded in Sahih Muslim, the Prophet said, "You will prevail over your enemies as long as you never swerve from my path. Once you stray from it, God will let others hold away over you, who will neither fear you nor have mercy on you until you come back to my sunnah (path)."

The present state of Muslims is not, in fact, the result of an enemy plot but of abandoning the Sunnah. Against the backdrop of riots, the Sunnah which should have been followed by Muslims is that of patience and avoidance. If the present state of affairs is the result of rejecting this Sunnah, it is only by readopting it that the present condition of Muslims be improved. No other strategy or policy can ever solve this problem.

It is incumbent upon Muslims to revert from impatience to patience; from the path of confrontation to that of avoidance. They must withstand provocation instead of giving in to it. This is the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam, the sole path to success.

Muslims have today to go on a 'migration.' But not a physical migration. A migration from one field of strategy to another. In this lies the veritable secret of success.

Paradise and Its Inhabitants

What is Paradise? Paradise is the supreme reward which God gives to His special servants for their deserving actions. Paradise is a world of unique blessings, admission to which is reserved for the chosen few in the second stage of life, the Hereafter.

God's special servants are those who have demonstrated in ample measure their ability to live on the plane of realities in this present stage of life – the stage of trial. They are the ones who have discovered God's existence from His signs; who have found that the messenger of God is a human being just like themselves; who, without having seen God, have prostrated themselves before Him in all humility.

These are unique human beings who, having been created with an ego, have nevertheless divested themselves of it in the interests of truth; who, having been given complete freedom of word and deed have voluntarily placed constraints upon themselves; who, having apparently achieved everything by dint of their own hard labour, have nonetheless given complete credit for all of their achievements to God.

These are unique souls who, living amongst human beings, are constantly remembering God. They are the ones who have had power over all others, but who now exercise it out of fear of God; it is they who have agitated to take revenge, but who have had the fire in their souls cooled by the fear of God's chastisement.

These are the worthy individuals who relish taking the back seats while others scramble for the front rows. These are the people who give their lives to lay solid foundations while others rush to find places right on tops of the domes.

These are the people of great spiritual refinement who rise above personal prejudices before sitting in judgement; who, in order to deal with others purely on the basis of principles, eliminate their own selves; who budge not one inch from the path of justice even at the most crucial of moments, when complaints and differences seem insurmountable. They do so by adopting a path for themselves which accords exactly with the path of truth and justice, and by overlooking all worldly considerations.

Paradise is God's garden. Only those human beings deserve it who can live in this world with the blameless innocence of flowers.

Nation Building

"Politicians are to be blamed for all corruption."

"Politicians have failed in fulfilling the expectations of the people."

This is the gist of what is being said everywhere. The question is, who are these politicians? These are the very people who have been glorified as freedom fighters for the last fifty years. Before independence, these freedom fighters played a heroic role for this country, but after independence, they have plunged the nation into a morass of iniquity.

Directly or indirectly it is these freedom fighters who are in control of all important political offices, hence it is they who are responsible for all the attendant evils. This was destined to happen after the country began to slither down the wrong course in 1948. As we know, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, peeping into the future, had suggested that the Congress as a political party should now, after gaining independence, be dissolved.

Why did Gandhiji have to make such a suggestion? Some commentators have pointed out that he was motivated by the fear that these freedom fighters, already waiting to be compensated for their sacrifices, might turn into exploiters in post-independence India. (*The Hindustan Times*, May 24, 1995)

As it happened, Gandhiji's worst apprehensions came horribly true. After assuming the rule of political leaders, the freedom fighters of the past began to recoup the price of their sacrifices with interest. Even their friends and relatives joined with them in their campaign to ensure for themselves a never-ending compensation. Consequently, the nation is now in a terrible pall of darkness, as is visible to all and sundry.

At the point we have reached today, no superficial reform can bring salvation to the country. It is possible to expend one hundred crores from the state treasury by holding to the condition of identity cards for elections, but such superficial plans can never ameliorate the body politic. We shall have to carve out a far more serious plan of action.

After independence we should have done exactly what the British people did. For them, Winston Churchill's position was one of a super freedom-fighter who had successfully saved Britain from being vanquished by Hitler. But in the 1945 elections, they voted this same Churchill out of power, and instead brought in Clement Attlee, a social reformer who as a member of the Fabian Society, had quite actively participated in the non-political field.

The same task needed to be performed after independence in India. The freedom fighters should have been awarded pensions and other facilities in acknowledgement of their services, but when it came to

assigning political power, such persons should have been sought out who had already established their reputations in social service in the field of education, social reform, scientific research, etc.

Those who emerged as heroes in the age prior to independence had well-developed warlike qualities which were essential in a period of clash and confrontation, whereas after independence we needed heroes possessing just the opposite qualities. At that time as now, it was necessary to have people who believed in love instead of hatred, in peace instead of confrontation; in short, in a constructive rather than a destructive approach. By making the team of freedom fighters into leaders of the second phase, the nation took the wrong turning at the very outset.

By reason of the psychology of their rise to power, the main concern of freedom fighters was to maintain the superior political position they had come to acquire. This mentality produced all sorts of abhorrent forms of evil, such as we have been experiencing today.

It was thanks to the extraordinary glorification of the freedom fighters that we were unable to see any of their acts in a critical light. For instance, the involvement in the Bangladesh war in 1971 was undoubtedly a wrong decision, but since this decision had been taken by a freedom fighter government, it came to be regarded as having been right without anyone having given the matter any real thought.

A similar, ill-considered involvement, stirred up the dormant problem of Kashmir and resulted in enormous economic losses. It is a fact that after a long period of time the Pakistanis had actually consigned the problem of Kashmir to oblivion. The issue of Kashmir was no longer, actively, on their political agenda. But when the involvement of India broke Pakistan into two, all Pakistanis were set to avenge this division of their country. In revenge, they re-opened the issue of the closed front of Kashmir. Sooner or later, nothing could have stopped Bangladesh from being separated from Pakistan. But our involvement caused this break to be wrongly attributed to us and thus a chapter which had already been closed was unnecessarily reopened.

What we required in New Delhi was a team imbued not with fighting spirit but with wisdom, who could run matters of state not on the basis of strength but with sagacity and understanding. True statesmanship means accomplishing 99 per cent of one's tasks with wisdom and one per cent with other factors. Today there is much talk of change and reform in the constitution. Articles are being published on this subject. Seminars are being held. But to me, this matter is being examined at a superficial level. No one reflects upon why the constitution, which has set up a record in the history of constitutional documents had to be amended eighty times and why, despite this the problems, for which these changes were made, remain unresolved. It is apparent that after these repeated experiments the actual problem is now not one of change in the constitution, but of changes having failed to achieve the desired results. It is in record that Dr. Rajendra Prasad in his valedictory address to the constituent Assembly, said that everything cannot be written in the Constitution, and stressed the need for healthy political conventions. But again the enthusiastic "freedom fighters" failed to adhere to this advice and everything was written down in the constitution.

As a result, the constitution no longer remained a simple document; it became instead a bundle of fanciful, romantic wishes. The attempt to include everything in the constitution rendered it unrealistic. It became an aggregate of contradictory and unattainable goals. Instead of becoming a practicable document, it assumed the form of a legal monolith.

Many examples can be cited of how our present constitution overreaches itself. For instance, the article on our national language declares that "For a period of fifteen years the English language shall continue to be the official language of the Union. Thereafter the official language shall be Hindi in Devnagari script."

To make such an announcement was simply wishful thinking, for matters of language are decided by historical factors rather than by legal articles. Since historical forces were not in favour of this article, it has remained totally ineffective. It amounted to dictating history, and no one is powerful enough to do so.

Similarly, article 44 relating to a uniform civil code, clashes with article 25 which establishes religious freedom. It is totally impracticable to have contradictory articles. If we wanted to enact article 44, we should have to delete article 25 from the constitution. And vice versa.

1. Such issues should tell us that attempt to make the constitution more comprehensive by making amendments to it must be abandoned. Instead, it needs to be reduced in size to make it into a more condensed and practicable legal document, just like the constitutions of the developed countries.
2. Another point to ponder is what had been advised by Dr Rajendra Prashad in his capacity as Chairman of the Constitution Assembly, that is, instead of heaping article upon article, stress must be laid on establishing healthy traditions in political and national life.
3. By healthy political traditions I mean, establishing one's base on political work and not on political stunts; setting up a free and fair election process; accepting defeat after losing in the elections; keeping national interest above personal political interest; resigning from office after major blunders (scams, etc.); endeavouring to win elections on the basis of principles rather than on the basis of money; respecting the law at all times, even when it is against oneself. The opposition should be a vehicle of healthy criticism rather than an agency out to down the ruling party; it should show willingness to run a coalition government, avoiding differences, etc., in case where there is no majority of a single party in the Assembly.
4. At this moment there are two prominent parties on the political scene in the country, Congress and the BJP. But to my way of thinking, both have outlived their usefulness as regards the larger interests of the country.

Congress leaders must know that by remaining in power for a long period of time they have exhausted the public's patience. Lord Acton said: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It should be added that remaining in power over a long period of time renders a person or a party unfit to

rule. Congress should admit this and voluntarily opt for retirement. Otherwise, future historians will record its role in dismal terms.

The elements composing the BJP from the very outset have demonstrated a negative mentality. These are the people who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. In the words of one of my Hindu friends, next feat they performed was the demolition of Ayodhya's historic mosque. In this way, they have shown themselves up as being unsuitable for constructive work in the country.

The BJP leaders point out that the secularism of the Congress is pseudo-secularism and to replace it they have offered the concept of Hindutva. Perhaps they do not know that Hindutva is not the alternative for pseudo-secularism. It is this error in thinking which has caused the BJP to fail as a party. No significant work of national construction may be expected from it.

In a large country like India only those who possess a universal outlook are capable of governing. Individuals who think along sectarian lines instead of being broad-minded, are not suitable for India's leadership.

5. Now the hour has come to form a fresh political party composed not of "freedom fighters" but of educational and social activists. It is only such people who can save India from ruination.

In the last three years I have travelled extensively all over the country. During my tours I have found that there are tens of thousands of individuals in our country who are capable of positive thinking, and are actively involved in the field of educational and social reform. They pine for the welfare of the country. All these people can be gathered at the platform of a new political party.

Today we stand at the most critical juncture of our history. To build a new and brighter future for our country, we have to work, on the one hand, for mass education, an outline for which I have already presented in *The Hindustan Times* of May 19, 1995. An equally important task is the formation of a new political party on the lines discussed above. To me the future of the country rests on the rigorous performance of these two tasks.

6. As a first step in the right direction I propose that a political meeting be convened at the All India level; this should not include those whose political records are marred in the eyes of the public. Only those should be invited to it whose records are clean and who are actively, practically involved in some field of national construction. This political convention can become the basis for a party with fresh vigour, capable of providing the right leadership to the country.

The Inner Reality of Fasting

"In the month of Ramadan the Quran was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.

"God desires your well-being, not your discomfort. He desires you to fast the whole month so that you may magnify Him and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance" (2:185).

The above verse explains not only the importance of the month of Ramadan as being the period during which the Quran was revealed, but also the significance of fasting during the month in terms of giving thanks to God. The Prophet is recorded as having said that God rewards good deeds from ten fold to 700 fold. His reward for fasting, which is undertaken especially for Him, will be infinite.

Food and drink are man's most basic necessities. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he understands how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of God's succour. In the evenings, after a whole day of fasting, people eat and drink their fill: that is when their hearts are flooded with a sense of gratitude to God for His having made complete provision for their needs. That is when they praise God and offer up their thanks to Him. This feeling of dependence on God's bounty also makes them adopt a properly cautious attitude to life. Verse 183, which states that "fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you," goes on to say, "perchance you will guard yourselves against evil."

But there is much more to fasting than the caution and gratitude induced by the purely outward, physical forms of abstention. Its greater significance lies in its symbolism of an inner, spiritual eagerness to make all kinds of sacrifices: as such, must be fully understood and appreciated. Obviously, one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days, but who goes throughout his life without any qualm about telling lies, persecuting his fellow men, thwarting justice, and so on, has missed the whole point of the fast of Ramadan. He has concerned himself all along with outward forms and not with inner realities. Such a man cannot expect to find favour in the eyes of his fellow men and will certainly incur the wrath of God, his Maker.

One who fasts in all sincerity takes care to cast his entire life in the one consistent mould. In all of his affairs, he applies the constraints laid down by God. He checks himself from abusing others, stays his hand from persecution and halts in his steps towards injustice. As the Prophet said, "Such a man can be likened to a tied-up horse which can go only as far as its rope permits: in that way, he cannot transgress."

Introducing Islam

All Praise is Due to God

One of the important teachings of Islam is that on receiving anything, we should be grateful to God in acknowledgment of His bounty, and utter these words 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.' Praise of God, in its true spirit, is the essence of the Qur'an. After having accepted Islam, a believer's inmost feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence is a blessing of God. Man's extremely balanced body is a blessing of God. The entire world created so favourably for man is a blessing of God.

When this reality dawns on man and he realizes God's immeasurable blessings upon him, his soul is filled with a feeling of gratefulness to God. His heart and mind are overawed by His greatness. At that moment words of acknowledgment of God—'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' spontaneously come to his lips.

God the Almighty is too great for man to give Him anything. The only thing man can offer in His presence is acknowledgment. The moment of man's greatest worship of God is when his soul is pervaded by God's glory and greatness; when he recognizes God's divinity as compared to man's servitude; when, in full awareness of his own helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties in the true sense of the word.

When man discovers God with all His attributes, his soul lies prostrate before Him. His whole being turns towards God. The feelings inspired in him by God's bounties surge within him like the waves of the ocean. When all these feelings find verbal form, they are called praise and gratefulness to God.

God is the greatest being of the universe. Yet, in a universe visible to all, God's supreme glory remains invisible. Realization of God is to discover this hidden greatness. This realization finds expression in words such as 'Praise be to God – Lord of the Worlds.'

May God Reward You

One of the teachings of Islam is that on receiving some gift or benefit from another, one should pray that God may reward the giver handsomely. Acknowledging a gift with the words: "May God reward you," not only expresses a high form of regard for the giver, but also testifies to the fact that God alone has it in His power to give rewards. When the recipient of a favour says to God on behalf of his benefactor: "O God, help him as he has helped me, and give him more than he has given me," this demonstrates an even higher form of regard.

The phrase 'May God reward you,' is expressive of two virtues, one being gratitude and the other being the willingness to give as well as to take. Its utterance emphasizes the principle that one should be a giver as well as a taker. A man should always be at pains to benefit those who have benefited him. He should be so thankful to his benefactor that he starts praying for them. A genuinely heart-felt prayer is the best gift that a man can give to his fellow – men.

Insha Allah (God Willing)

One of the teachings of Islam is that when we undertake a task, we should start by saying, 'Insha Allah,' – God willing. According to the Qur'an, the owners of a certain orchard made it known that they intended to pluck its fruits as soon as they were ripe. But they added no reservation such as: 'If it be God's will.' When they reached their orchard the next morning, they found that a God-sent calamity had destroyed their entire crop.

This was the result of their having omitted to say 'God willing' (68: 18).

God willing (*Insha Allah*) is a phrase of great significance. Islam teaches us that whenever a man is going to embark upon any venture, he should say, 'if God wills' before he begins. This is to acknowledge the reality that God alone is the Doer in this world. A person can achieve his ends successfully only when God's blessings are with him. God alone has the power to make things happen, as everything functions according to His will. Man can only wish for certain happenings, but occurrence rests with God alone.

When man thinks seriously of God's all-powerfulness and his own total helplessness, such feelings find expression in the words, 'Insha Allah.' In this way he acknowledges that he can only make a beginning. So far as the completion of the task is concerned, it lies entirely in God's hands.

The phrase Insha Allah in its essence is a form of prayer. Beginning one's work with Insha Allah is like seeking God's company and when God, the Lord of the universe, accompanies us on our journey, who can stop us from reaching our destination?

Conveyance

To facilitate travel in this world, we have to use transport of one kind or another. Islam teaches us that when we make use of these different means of transport, we must remember God and say: 'Glory to Him who has subjected these to us. But for Him we could never have accomplished this. To our Lord we shall return.' (43:13-14)

One of God's countless bounties to man is His provision of suitable conveyances. To meet different requirements man has to travel from one place to another. But he cannot traverse long distances on foot. God has therefore come to his aid and made certain things subject to him in order that he may utilize them as transport.

Initially, animals alone were the means of conveyance. Then man crossed the seas, making ships for travelling long distances. Investigations revealed that God had endowed matter with such properties that it could be fashioned into much more rapid forms of transport. Hence the motor car and the aeroplane came into existence.

All means of transportation, right from the horse to the aeroplanes, are blessings of God. If they were brought into being, it was entirely due to God having harnessed the potential of nature to human use. When man thinks of all these bounties showered upon him by God he spontaneously calls out: 'O God, It is You who has subjected everything to us. It would not otherwise have been possible for us to make use of things as we have.'

Blessings are of benefit to the thankful person in this world as well as in the next. All that a thankless person will receive is temporary provision in this world and eternal chastisement in the next.

Inna Lillah

It often happens in this world that man loses something, or suffers some calamity. On such occasions, Islam teaches us to willingly resign ourselves to our misfortune, taking that to be God's decree. On all such occasions the sufferer should utter the words: 'We belong to God and we shall return to Him.'

God has made this world for the purpose of putting mankind to the test. Here, receiving and losing are both designed as a trial for man. Therefore, when man receives something, he should prove himself to be a thankful servant of God. And when he loses something he should adopt the attitude of patience. Only one who can do so will pass God's test.

In this world man cannot save himself from experiencing unpleasant things. Sometimes he will suffer from the pangs of hunger and thirst, at others, a life very dear to him will pass away or he will incur a loss of wealth. On all such occasions these words must come to his lips ... 'We belong to God and we shall all return to Him.'

Through these words man acknowledges his status of servitude vis-à-vis God's all-powerfulness. He expresses himself in words such as these: O God, You are the giver. If You have taken something out of what You have given me, You had the right to do so.

Saying Inna Lillah is a form of worship. This is to adopt the attitude of surrendering to God's will instead of complaining against fate. It is to convert the loss into a new discovery.

This phrase, 'We are from God and to God we shall return' is, in short, an acknowledgment of God's godhead on the part of His servants.

After Eating and Drinking

One of the teachings of Islam is to praise God, after satisfying one's hunger and thirst, in words such as these: All praise is due to God who provided me with food and water, and who made me one of the believers.

Man cannot survive without food and water. He requires these things continuously throughout his entire life. For man's requirements God has made perfect arrangements. On the one hand, He has provided water in abundance on the earth, on the other, He has provided ample nourishment which man can obtain with the minimum of effort.

When a believer is hungry and thirsty, and he eats and drinks, he is overwhelmed with the feeling of how great that God is who has made such splendid provision for him. If God had not done so, he would have suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst, having had to go without food and water. His whole body expresses his acknowledgment of God's bounties and he calls out: Praise be to God for all of His abundant provisions!

On receiving bodily sustenance the believer is reminded of the spiritual sustenance provided for him by God. Through revelation God gave man the knowledge of what He wants from him, thus enabling him to lead us life according to His will and ensuring his success in the next eternal world. Man then remembers God with even greater adoration.

Every moment of his life, man ought to keep praising God, – God, who has made the most superb provision for him, both physical as well as spiritual.

Rising from Sleep (The life after death)

The Prophet of Islam likened death to sleep and life to the state of wakefulness after sleep. When he awakened in the morning, he would say: "All praise and thanks are due to God who gave us life after death."

For the rest of mankind, waking and sleeping are likewise symbolic of life and death. Going to sleep is like dying and waking up in the morning is like rising from the grave. Our inevitable awakening after sleeping foreshadows with certainty how we shall arise after death to give an account of our deeds on the Day of Judgement.

Man has to pass his life in this world in such a way that every happening becomes for him a reminder of the Day of Judgement. His sleeping and rising should also serve as reminders of life after death.

The most delicate aspect of man's life is that his existence does not come to an end after death. He has to be reborn in another world. The present world is the world of action, while the world to come will be one in which he reaps his reward. That will be the beginning of a new and eternal life – either eternal heaven or eternal hell.

Man is reminded daily of this most important reality when he goes to sleep and when he rises from sleep. In this way, actions of this world come to remind man of the hereafter.

The Prophet of Islam used to lead a very simple life and laid great stress on believers doing likewise. Once he said, "O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.' 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.'

When man has discovered the greatness of God, his own-existence in comparison appears quite insignificant. This feeling makes him into a truly modest person. His whole being is coloured in the hue of servitude. His manner ceases to be aggressive and his voice becomes gentle. Even his gait expresses his modesty. His whole attitude comes to reflect a new seriousness.

All this inevitably results in his preferring simplicity in everything, in food, drink, living arrangements, and so on. He avoids luxuries, pomp and show. His soul finds pleasure and contentment in leading a life of simplicity instead of indulgence.

True faith leads man away from artificial things to nature, where simplicity is the rule. He develops a liking for a simple way of life which is more natural. This naturalness behoves the believer. Naturalness is in accordance with his modesty and humility, themselves great virtues in the eyes of God.

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Wealth and power breed hatred and enmity

When the spoils of war arrived from Qadsiyah (Iran) Umar was seen to weep as he examined them. Abdur Rahman, enquiring as to what had caused the Commander of the Faithful such grief, observed, "God has granted you victory over your enemies, giving you possession of their riches so that you may be joyful." To this Umar replied that he had heard the Prophet say: "Whenever worldly riches are showered upon a people, God stirs up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection." "That is what I fear," explained Umar.

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)